

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: October 20, 2008

From :  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 11: Consideration of resolution authorizing an augmentation of grant SMM-0753 from Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for interpretation of the Los Angeles River and Santa Monica Bay Watersheds, including visitor serving amenities and naturalist led interpretive programs for the public as well as programs specifically designed for disadvantaged youth.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a an augmentation of grant SMM-0753 from Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for interpretation of the Los Angeles River and Santa Monica Bay Watersheds, including visitor serving amenities and naturalist led interpretive programs for the public as well as programs specifically designed for disadvantaged youth.

Legislative Authority: Sections 33204.2(a), 33204.27(a), 75050(g)(2) and 75060(d)(1) of the Public Resources Code.

Background: In 2007 the Conservancy approved a grant to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for interpretation of the Los Angeles River and Santa Monica Bay watersheds. This action augments that grant so that programs implemented and developed can continue to serve the public. The budget represents a decrease of 23% with no reduction of services, due to implementation of revenue programs within the Division of Interpretation to provide matching support for public programs and programs for Title I Schools. .

Interpretation, as defined in the measure, includes but is not limited to, “a visitor serving amenity that educates and communicates the significance and value of natural, historical, and cultural resources in a way that increases the understanding and enjoyment of these resources and that may utilize the expertise of a naturalist or other specialist skilled at educational interpretation.” (Public Resources Code Section 75005(i)) The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) has a long history of providing relevant and meaningful interpretation and education programs that not only enhance the visitor experience but promote stewardship and protection of the resources.

Programs specifically designed for urban communities is also an important focus of this grant. The Conservancy statute, Section 33204.5 of the Public Resource Code, says “The Conservancy shall implement a program to provide recreational access from downtown Los Angeles and the

inner city. . . in order to provide recreational opportunities for all income and ethnic groups wishing to enjoy the Santa Monica Mountains.” Los Angeles has fewer acres of accessible parks per person than any major U.S. city, and poor neighborhoods suffer the most. Only 30 percent of Angelenos live within a quarter mile of a park, compared with between 80 percent and 90 percent in Boston and New York.

In addition to the programs and materials developed for the general public, specific focus will continue to be on amenities and programs which serve disadvantaged communities. This includes programs at Vista Hermosa Park and along the Los Angeles River, as well as ensuring that disadvantaged youth have access to the mountains through transportation, education and interpretive programs and overnight camping in the Santa Monica Mountains. The measure defines a disadvantaged community to be a community with a median household income less than 80% of the statewide average. A “Severely disadvantaged community” means a community with a median household income less than 60% of the statewide average. (Public Resources Code Section 75005(g)).

This grant of \$675,000 will fund interpretation of the Los Angeles River and Santa Monica Bay Watersheds, including visitor serving amenities and naturalist led interpretive programs for the public as well as programs specifically designed for disadvantaged youth, \$300,000 in the Los Angeles River Watershed and \$375,000 in the Santa Monica Bay Watershed.

The specific scope of services that will be provided, includes:

Guided interpretive programs, including program development and implementation, directly relating to the watershed’s rich natural, cultural and historic resources. Programming will focus on interpretation of the site's endangered species, ecology, importance in the watershed, conservation, biodiversity, Mediterranean ecosystems, wildlife corridors, and fire ecology.

Partial funding of an interpretive newsletter, “Symbiosis” which is printed quarterly and distributed to over 2,000 addresses as well as being available at all park locations. In 2007 Symbiosis was redesigned and processes were implemented to make the production and distribution “greener.”;

Seasonal campfire programs at 6 locations, featuring presentations that increase the understanding and enjoyment of the outdoors, and watershed resources;

Interpretive materials, including site specific materials, program schedules, safety information and self guided interpretation that are designed and implemented to increase visitors enjoyment and understanding of the watershed;

Seasonal camping programs for disadvantaged youth ensuring that they enjoy the access to parklands;

Weekly River Ranger program for youth 8-12 designed to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the Los Angeles River, at both the Los Angeles River Center and surrounding community and Vista Hermosa Park.;

Monthly Transit to Trails Program providing staffing and programs for families from disadvantaged communities to parklands of the watershed from both the Los Angeles River center area and Vista Hermosa Park. Transportation funds for this program are provided by a separate funding source;

A minimum of twice weekly interpretive programs for youth from the community surrounding Vista Hermosa Park at this new park site;

Development and implementation of the Vista Hermosa Park Leadership Program, which will include recruitment, training and employment of young adults from the community surrounding Vista Hermosa for the purposes of increasing their enjoyment of understanding of the parks resources as well as communicating that understanding to other community members.

Development and implementation of a volunteer program at King Gillette Ranch, modeled after that of the William O. Douglas Outdoor classroom, in order to increase the number of visitor serving amenities available to the public at this extremely popular regional facility.

Continued programming for the public and Title I schools at King Gillette Ranch and Temescal Gateway Park.

See budgets in attached applications.